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ABSTRACT

While the legal question of what constitutes a private school--and whether home schools can continue to operate as such--remains a matter to be resolved by the courts or further legislation, a separate question remains: What should be the role and relationship of home schools to the educational network of the future? Economically and technologically, home schools are already a viable alternative to centralized school systems in rural Appalachia. Educational policy is needed which permits home schools to realize their potential as educational settings. This paper begins with background information about West Virginia noting that the values and lifestyles of recent inmigrants, combined with changes in the compulsory school attendance laws in 1983, stimulated an interest in home schooling in the rural areas of the state. The bulk of the paper relates the experience of a family who moved to a small farm in Mineral County, West Virginia, in 1976. Emphasis is on family values, especially as they relate to the choice to teach children at home. Academic achievement requirements are discussed and standardized scores are reported for the two oldest children. The family's use of educational television and personal computer are outlined. (JHZ)

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HOME-BOUND SCHOOLS: AN ALTERNATIVE FOR RURAL AREAS

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HOME-BOUND SCHOOLS: AN ALTERNATIVE FOR RURAL AREAS

Appalachia is a geographical region stretching north and south from central New York to northern Alabama. The region is bound on the east by the Allegheny Mountain ranges and on the west by the labyrinthine roughs of the Ohio Valley. A part of ten states are contained within this geographical region, but only West Virginia, as a state, is completely enclosed within the boundaries of Appalachia. It is this location within Appalachia that provides West Virginia its unique and individual character. The mountainous terrains that traverse the region are not known for their height or majestic peaks as are the Rocky Mountains of the West, but, rather, the region is characterized by a multiplicity of steep and rugged mountain ranges with an equal number of deep and narrow valleys. The highest point in West Virginia, Spruce Knob, reaches only 5,280 feet above sea level, but within this same area there are forty-six such peaks with some 288 mountain ranges reaching nearly the same height.

These rugged mountain ranges, which for years were a formidable barrier to westward expansion, offered the Scotch-Irish, Scotch, German, Swiss, English, and others who settled among them a sheltered haven within which they could develop or retain their peculiar patterns of life. This they did in isolation without pressure or influence from the larger national culture. The extent of this difference in lifestyle with that of the national culture, is expressed well by Theodore White in his book, The Making Of A President 1960. White who was reporting John F. Kennedy's primary campaign in Wisconsin followed him to West Virginia. Upon arriving

in West Virginia he reports that, "only 640 miles separate Madison, the capital of Wisconsin, from Charleston, the capital of West Virginia. Yet centuries of time and tradition, immeasurable gulfs of culture, separate these two states".

The early economy of the region was first agrarian, consisting largely of family-size farms scattered throughout the valleys and hillsides. This economy was later supplemented by the cutting and removal of timber from the mountains, and, then, the extraction of coal from under the ground. The small family farm and the extraction of natural resources remains the economic base of today.

The rugged mountainous terrain with an economy based on extraction of natural resources has multiplied the educational problems for West Virginians. These problems are closely related to difficulties of financing, constructing and maintaining an adequate transportation system throughout the state. In the absence of suitable transportation facilities, the solution has been to locate schools in remote and sparsely populated sections in order to make them accessible to those who live there. This solution has resulted in a proliferation of small schools located in remote areas that serve a small student enrollment. Citizens of these regions have been reluctant to give up their schools in favor of consolidation, not always because they wish to retain their community school, but more often because of the hazards and dangers, to say nothing of the time required, in transporting students to larger population centers. Today, Pickens High School, with a 1986 graduating class of three, remains in the southern end of Randolph County not only because the citizens of the area are opposed to giving it up, but because county school officials are not yet prepared to assume the responsibility nor liability of transporting children some

twenty-five miles over steep and narrow roads which are not safe for busses under the best weather conditions.

A study by the Appalachian Regional Commission, published in 1986, compares the relative progress of Appalachian counties with other counties of the nation. This study reports that Appalachia made unprecedented economic growth during the 1970s when compared with the nation on four factors - population, income, unemployment, and urbanization. However, the study also reports that Appalachia experienced a stronger downward trend with regard to three of these factors between 1980 and 1985 than was characteristic of the nation as a whole. The one index that did not show a downward trend for Appalachia was population. While the increase in population did not match that of the nation, it did continue an upward trend that started in the 1970s. This increased population, due to people entering the region, reversed the outmigration pattern established for the region in the 1940s. The significance of this report is to point out that while conditions of unemployment and per capita income for Appalachia took a severe downturn in 1980 compared with the nation, one-third of the counties of Appalachia had an above average population growth. The report does not attempt to account for this continued increase in population. One explanation, however, that does account for this continued growth is the influx of people from urban centers of the eastern seaboard who migrate to the region in search for a location whereby they can reaffirm life patterns and values no longer accepted or practiced in the national culture as a whole. These values relate to all aspects of their life including the family structure and organization, work dependency, food procurement and consumption, and health care delivery. What is apparent is that the inmigration of these people

to the Appalachian region is motivated, in part, by the experiences of the 1960s, the energy crisis of the 1970s, and a rejection of the emptiness and alienation of the conspicuous consumption lifestyle of the 1980s. These persons coming into the region have found that the isolation of Appalachia affords them an opportunity for a more self-sufficient lifestyle based on values difficult to maintain in the larger national culture. In the course of their re-location, they have also discovered that their newly chosen lifestyle can be enhanced with the proper use of appropriate and high-tech forms of technology now available to them. It is this combination of factors, aided by changes in the compulsory school attendance laws in 1983, that stimulated an interest in home-bound schools in the rural areas of West Virginia.

Beaver Run Academy

Kenny DiVello was born in Philadelphia of Italian parents in 1948. His wife, Penny, was also born in Philadelphia of Irish-Catholic parents in 1950. Both, Kenny and Penny, were reared and attended schools in the middle to upper-middle class suburbs of Philadelphia. After graduation from high school, Kenny attended three years of college, while Penny elected to travel through Europe. They were married in 1973.

The DiVellos reached adolescence during the mid-1960s. Like others who came-of-age during this time period, they were sensitive to, and aware of, the changes occurring in American society. It was not merely the Vietnam War that disenchanted them, but, more significantly, they were disturbed by the evident breakdown of basic patterns and structures of life within society. It may well be that

the 1960s will be recognized as more traumatic in the history of man than were the revolutionary ideas of Copernicus or those of the Reformation. In fact, the revolutionary period of the 1960s included both elements of the former two historical periods. Not only was man's stable position in the universe shaken by Einstein's thoughts on Relativity, but, too, was the individual's relationship with his society brought into question. Adolescents were more affected by these basic, but subtle changes, than were the adult participants of the society. At any rate, the DiVellos, like many others of their age group, began searching for whatever new directions or life patterns would ultimately evolve from the fractured society. They were not certain what these directions would be, but began their course by taking one small step at a time. They spent three years in the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania among the Pennsylvania Dutch farmers. Here they found a new way of life with the land and an opportunity to develop and refine the skills necessary for maintaining that lifestyle. In 1976, through contact with friends, they purchased a small farm in Mineral County, West Virginia. Mineral County is located at the northern section of the Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia. While sparsely populated, it lies at the foot of the Allegheny Mountains, but not in the more mountainous regions of central Appalachia. In 1977, with some knowledge of the kind of lifestyle they were seeking and how they proposed to interface with aspect of the more dominate culture, they moved onto their small farm. That year they were confronted with their first test of faith. Their first child, Sara, was soon to be born. Because they did not wish to submit to the strict requirements and regulations of institutionalized medicine, Sara was born at home with only an inexperienced nurse present to assist.

Annie, their second child was born in the hospital in Romney only because a Caesarian delivery became necessary. However, the experience with this birth further convinced them that they would prefer to remain outside of limits of institutionalized medicine, and, so, their next two children (Hanna and Kevin) were born at home despite warnings by the medical establishment to the contrary. The direction of the lifestyle the DiVellos were taking did not include a rejection of modern medicine. Rather, it requested an enlightened medical practice that would cooperate with them in the choices they made about the way in which their children were to be born. These personal decision, they did not want to relinquish to the medical profession.

The essence of the lifestyle the DiVellos were to accept and understand was one that preserved choice in the management of the events of their lives, their time, their efforts and their family matters. They were able to continue in this direction by not relinguishing these important decisions about their life to institutionalized and professionalized segments of the larger society. One of the major problems was solved when Kenny DiVello developed his trade skills in plumbing, electricity, carpentry, and mechanics. With these skills, he could then seek employment as needed by accepting small contractual jobs that left sufficient time to devote to home and farm.

When Sara reached school age, the DiVellos were once again confronted with a test to their maturing lifestyle. If she attended public schools, it would require transporting her two miles on dirt road before reaching the bus stop. From there, she would have an additional hour or more bus ride to school. As formidable as these obstacles were, however, they were not the determining factors in

their decision not to enrolling Sara in public schools. Consistent with their position, they preferred to rely on themselves for the management and arrangement of Sara's education. In so doing it was their belief that they could avoid some of the undesirable aspects of institutionalized education. In particular they disapproved of the authoritarian position of the teacher in regard to subject matter, the ever presence of peer influence, the competitive evaluation system, and the standardized socialization process that is intent on preparing the individual for acceptance in a structured society. Their intentions were to create a learning setting which would permit the individual to seek her own nature, structure her own knowledge, solve her own problems, and seek learning activities at appropriate times when self-motivated. As time for school attendance approached, they began to seek ways of accomplishing these aims.

Their first effort was to apply for exemption on the grounds of distance of residence from a school or school bus route. While they lived two miles from the school bus stop, the required distance by law, their application was rejected by county school officials. Their second effort, with recommendation of local school officals, was to apply as a school under Exemption K of the newly formulated school attendance laws. This they did by forming the Beaver Run Academy. Their application was accepted and acknowledged by the West Virginia State Department of Education. The regulations under Exemption K required only that the State Department be notified of intent to form a school, identification of its chief administrator, establishment of minimum instructional terms, prescribed health and safety regulations, notification of students enrolled, and annual standardized achievement testing.

The Curriculum

The major thrust of the curriculum at Beaver Run Academy is to make learning an integral part of the on-going life activities of the setting. The basic skills of reading, writing, and mathematics are incorporated into activities of cooking, sewing, canning, gardening, and equipment repair. Ever opportunity and occasion is used to teach basic skills without artificially separating them from the everyday activities of living. These learning activities are later expanded as each child seeks more information and acquires more skills to pursue her interests in greater depth. At this point the curriculum becames more formalized to permit extensive reading and writing activities. Formalized procedures are also introduced for drill in reading, writing, mathematics, spelling and grammar. During the past year, two innovative procedures were introduced at Beaver Run Academy. Both of these innovations expanded the curriculum offerings far beyond what was possible with more traditional procedures. These innovations included the installation of a satellite dish and the acquisition of a personal computer. The satellite dish unit permits reception of a large variety of educational programming in science, history, literature, geography, and other subject matter areas. Its potential for expanding the educational setting is without bounds. Likewise, the presence of a personalized computer offers not only educational programming for individualized drill, but, more significantly, it provides a system whereby the learner can interact with stored information, create her own information base, or make use of a word processor. These technological systems provide the potential for the dissemination of

information as nothing has since printing made books the major source of accumulated knowledge.

Measuring Student Progress

Exemption K of the compulsory attendance law requires each school to report student progress by use of standardized test results. Sara was administrated a standardized achievement test at the end of her first, second, and third year in attendance at Beaver Run Academy. Annie, her sister, was also administrated a standardized test at the end of her first year. The results of their performance for each year are presented in table form giving the performance area measured with corresponding percentile ranking based on national norms for their age groups.

Table 1

Results of Standardized Achievement Test for Grade 1 - Sara

Test or Section	NPCT	NSTN
Letter Sounds	81	7
Word Recognition Part I	48	5
Word Recognition Part II	73	6
Reading Comprehension	64	6
Reading Total	68	6
Language Part I	83	7
Language Part II	95	8
Total Language	94	8
Math Computation	80	7
Math Concepts and Application	93	8
Total Battery	82	7

At the end of Grade 1, Sara demonstrated high achievement consistently across all areas except Word Recognition Part I where

her scores drop into the average range. Particularly high were her verbal skills and application of math concepts.

Table 2

Results of Standardized Achievement Test for Grade 2 - Sara

Test or Section	NPCT	NSTN
Word Attack	73	6
Vocabulary	82	7
Reading Comprehension	73	6
Total Reading	78	7
Spelling	71	6
Language Mechanics	80	7
Language Expression	84	7
Total Language	85	7
Math Computation	80	7
Math Concepts and Application	67	6
Total Math	78	7
Total Battery	81	7

Sara's achievement at the end of Grade 2 continues to be above that of eighty percent of second graders nationally. Her over-all performance varied by only one percentile rank, again showing consistently high achievement across all subject areas measured. An analysis of sub-tests show high performance in all word attack skills, sentence structure and parts of speech, and in problem solving and measurement. Her lowest performance in math was in number sentences.

Table 3

Results of Standardized Achievement Test for Grade 3 - Sara

Test or Section	NPCT	NSTN
Verbal Reasoning	98	9
Nonverbal Reasoning	82	7
Reading Vocabulary	75	7
Reading Comprehension	94	9
Total Reading	94	9
Spelling	73	7
Language Mechanics	74	7
Language Expression	90	8
Total Language	90	8
Math Computation	79	7
Math Concepts and Application	85	7
Total Math	82	7
Total Basic Skills	94	9
Reference Skills	79	7
Science	97	9
Social Studies	95	9

An analysis of sub-tests show Sara's lowest performance to be missing words in context for vocabulary skills, with high achievement in measurement and number theory, and with high performance in the Science areas of Botany, Zoology, and Physics. The Social Studies sub-tests show high performance in Geography, Economics, and Sociology. The results also report her subject interests to be high in art, music, and reading. Only in math are her interests rated less than average.

Sara's subject matter achievement remains high over the three year period. It is difficult to find isolated areas of weakness in her achievement profile.

Annie, Sara younger sister, also completed achievement testing at the close of her first year of school attendance at Beaver Run

Academy. The results of her performance are presented in the table below.

Table 4

Results of Standardized Achievement Test for Grade 1 - Annie

Test or Section	NPCT	NSTN
Word Attack	64	6
Vocabulary	71	6
Reading Comprehension	42	5
Total Reading	53	5
Language Expression	54	5
Math Computation	79	7
Math Concepts and Application	99	9
Total Math	97	9

An analysis of sub-test in language show Annie scoring at the average range in passage details and character analysis, but high in areas of grammar and sentence structure. Her performance in mathematics is phenomenal. Results of sub-tests show she missed only one whole number problem, and none in numeration, problem solving or measurement.

In summary, these standardized test results for both girls show high achievement in basic skills and in areas of curriculum strengths. It is to be expected that with the introduction of computerized instruction further progress will be made in writing, expression, and computation. Furthermore, while these mesurements are limited to academic performance only, other observations of social and personal adjustment are equally as encouraging.

The Controversy

From 1983 through 1985, the number of home schools in rural West Virginia increased significantly. The increase in home schools during this period was due, in part, to legislation that permitted schools to be formed under Exemption K of the Compulsory Attendance Laws of the State. Exemption K, unlike Exemption B, required only that the new school inform the State Superintendent of intent to operate a school and submit to standardized testing procedures to show student progress. Under Exemption B, however, home schools require approval by the county board of education and are subject to the same requirements and regulations as other public schools. Generally, this has come to mean certified teachers and curriculum for all such home schools. In 1985 a new State Superintendent questioned the legality of forming home schools under Exemption K. In search of support for his opinion he requested a ruling by the Attorney General's office. The opinion prepared by that office upheld the ruling of the State Superintendent of Schools. In essence, the opinion stated that the formation of home schools were subject to regulations as prescribed by Exemption B, and that Exemption K applied only to private schools. However, this opinion has not yet resolved the legal question for home schools since most were formed as private schools under Exemption K.

While the legal question of what constitutes a private school, and whether home schools can continue to operate as such, remain a matter to be resolved either by the courts or further legislation, a separate question is raised by the issue. This question relates to the role and relationship of home schools to the educational network of the future. It is apparent at this point that the taditional

home-to-school relationship will be altered by future economic and technological developments. Already, economically and technologically, home schools are a viable alternative to centralized school systems in rural Appalachia. As the cost, in both time and money, of transporting students and maintaining large centralized school plants continues to increase, these options will be offset by lower cost and improved efficiency of piping information to decentralized locations where students are in residence. With the given state of technology today, location is irrelevant. Indeed, it may prove to be a costly mistake, and an inappropriate use of technology, to equip centralized school plants with small personal computers and other technological devices. Perhaps such devices better serve a decentralized approach. It may prove much more profitable in looking ahead to examine the issue of home vs school on the basis of what each setting can provide the individual learner. It is certain that this relationship must be re-examined and that the decisions arrived at be based on evidence of conditions which maximize cost benefits and efficiency of learning.

In the 1970s, B. F. Skinner and other psychologists and educational leaders, recognized many of the undesirable aspects inherent in the classroom setting that proved disruptive to efficient learning. They subsequently pointed out the benefits of individualized learning settings where conditions of the learning environment could be controlled and learners could maximize their responding. As an alternative to group instruction they devised such variations as programmed instruction and teaching machines. All of these devices ultimately proved inadequate. This inadequacy, however, was not due to recognized principles regarding the value of

individual learning, but, rather, to the inability of the technology to deliver instructional material efficiently. What has occurred since that time has been the development of communication technology with the capacity to correct former ills. Today, the combination of knowledge about learning, accompanied by capable delivery systems, provide unprecedented means for altering the structure of educational institutions. As these alterations occur, the role of the home and school need to be revised. This revision can be accomplished best by adopting a policy which permits home schools to realize their potential as educational settings. Similarly, this revision must include a re-definition of the responsibility of state and local school officials. It may well be that this new relationship becomes one whereby the major function of the educational establishment is to monitor or certify demonstrated competencies, rather than prescribing how these specified competencies are obtained. Such a revision would allow for multiple educational settings, the most satisfactory of which may be the home setting, particularly for children who, for what ever reason, do not reside near a population center or choose not to attend the public schools.